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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003590

SIPDIS

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TAGS: KIRF PGOV PHUM PREL IZ  
SUBJECT: NINEWA CHRISTIANS SLOWLY RETURN

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3538  
    1B. BAGHDAD 3424  
    1C. BAGHDAD 3454

Classified By: A/DCM Robert Ford for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

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¶1. (C) Estimates of the number of Mosul Christians killed in early-October attacks range between eight and 15, with military sources (ISF and CF) giving lower figures than the Christian IDPs who fled the city. Since then, a well-coordinated humanitarian assistance effort has provided for approximately 2000 families that sought refuge in Christian villages in Ninewa. The GOI has sought to reassure the IDPs it is safe to return by dedicating police security units dispatched to Mosul as part of the ongoing "Operation Mother of Two Springs" anti-insurgent operation to protect Christian neighborhoods. This has had a positive effect on encouraging returns. The Prime Minister has established three high-level investigating committees to determine responsibility for the terror campaign, while information available to the USG indicates Al Qaeda responsibility. There is a risk these committees could serve as vehicles for politically-motivated allegations rather than impartial appraisals of fact. End summary.

Fear-Induced Flight, Returns Picking Up

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¶2. (C) In response to violence and intimation in early October, at least 1800 Christian families left Mosul primarily between October 9 and 13. Most remained within Iraq, while a few reportedly fled to Turkey, Syria, and Jordan. On October 29, the head of UNHCR in Erbil reported that the number of displaced families had reached 2,455 as of October 28. Outflows had "steadied" and it does not appear there has been any significant displacement since then. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) and the KRG's Department of Displacement and Migration (DDM) are reviewing their lists to identify errors and duplications. A relatively small number of Christians were personally threatened; most appear to have fled owing to reports of the murders, the circulation of flyers threatening Christians, and the departure of others.

¶3. (C) On October 19, USAID/OFDA partner International Medical Corps (IMC) reported that 1884 families had taken refuge in Christian villages surrounding Mosul. The IMC officer in Mosul reported on October 29 that more than 173 families had returned to Mosul, but that few had notified the MoDM of their return. From the end of October on, IDP returns began to pick up. On October 30, MoDM cited a lower figure when it "confirmed" to UNHCR that 80 families had returned and only 22 of those had actually registered as returnees. Christian parliamentarian Younadam Kanna told us the same evening that many Christians were returning; for example, 122 of the 192 families that had fled to Al-Qosh had returned to Mosul. On November 6, IMC reported that 593 Christian families had returned and on November 8,

Ninewa PRT's contacts estimate conservatively that between 700-800 families had returned. All Christian civil servants are back at work, as are most teachers and university students. The PRT is reaching out to Christian contacts and district and provincial officials to get a more exact figure.

On November 10, Hamdaniya village contacts told visiting PRT leader that 35-40 percent of the IDP families in these communities have returned to Mosul, with many others commuting in each day to work or school. Security was cited as the grounds for returning, by both returnees and those who have stayed. Many had heard from neighbors that conditions were improving, with more Iraqi Police and Army patrolling the streets.

#### GOI Vows Tough Action to Determine Responsibility

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**¶4.** (C) On October 15, PM Maliki sent a high-level delegation to Mosul to assess the IDP situation, coordinate security reinforcement, and initiate an investigation to determine responsibility for the attacks on Mosul's Christians. PM Maliki's Advisor on Christian Affairs, Georges Bakoos, told us on October 27 that three GOI committees were investigating the attacks: one led by the ISF, one by Iraqi intelligence agencies, and one by MoD Abdul Qadir on behalf of the CoM. The findings of the investigations are not yet complete. Bakoos intimated to us that Kurdish politics lay behind the attack, but did not provide evidence. (Comment: Given the Prime Minister's cool relations with the Kurds, we fear the committees' work might not be an impartial investigation but a search for facts that support a predetermined outcome -- i.e., that the

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KRG is responsible. Bakoos takes AQI's disclaimer of responsibility at face value. End Comment.). The MoHR sent a team to investigate the situation in October and concluded in its fact-finding report, a copy of which was shared with Poloff, that the crisis was "pre-planned by criminal groups" and was the result of a "deterioration of the security situation." The report claimed that the KRG had built three villages before the crisis and used these villages to house over 100 displaced families, and that most families moved to disputed areas between the KRG and GOI. The MoHR report noted that the security forces' initial response to the attacks against Christians was slow and inadequate. Many IDP families, it stated, told the MoHR fact-finding team that they do not trust Mosul governorate's security institutions.

**¶5.** (SBU) On October 30, UNHCR Erbil reported at the UN/OCHA Coordination meeting that the emergency phase is now considered over. UNAMI met with the National Operations Center (NOC) of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and had the following to report: NOC has issued instructions to not refer to the situation in Nineva as "displacement," but rather as "departures." The Iraqi police has mapped where the displaced originate from and the Army has been tasked to protect property and individuals. According to the NOC, it appears that "terrorists" have moved into Nineva from Diyala, in the course of anti-terrorist operations there. Locations of the Nineva IDPs are considered safe. Two key Embassy Christian contacts, Kanna and Chaldean Bishop Shlaimon Wardouni, praised the GOI-provided security reinforcements to the Ambassador during a November 5 meeting (Ref A); Wardouni added that he hoped they would remain in place.

#### Strong, Prompt Humanitarian Response

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**¶6.** (C) On October 9, IMC received a request from the MoDM to provide food and non-food items to the IDPs. OFDA approved and purchased the items the same day and began distributing them on October 10. GOI contacts told us they would do everything possible to encourage Christians from Mosul to return to their former residences. The KRG Ministry of Interior immediately began distributing 250,000

Iraqi dinars to each displaced family registered with local authorities. The MoDM announced shortly afterward that it would disburse 300,000 Iraqi Dinars (\$256.00 a month for six months) to displaced families. It has set up an office in Bashika to process the monthly stipends. MoDM is also offering payments of one million Iraqi Dinars (\$855) to families that return to Mosul. (Note: The stipends and lump-sum returnee payments are standardized country-wide.) Compensation for property and looting damages will be paid separately. UNAMI and PRT reporting assesses the assistance efforts as strong and adequate, although long-term displacements could stress the water, sanitation, health, and education systems of host communities. According to UNHCR, the distribution of non-food items has essentially ended and humanitarian workers are beginning to shift their focus to longer terms needs of the displaced.

#### **Culpability and Politics**

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**¶7. (C)** Assyrian news sources and anti-Kurd politicians such as Osama al-Nujaifi accuse the KRG of responsibility for attacks on Christians, as part of an underhanded effort to gain Christian support for an autonomous Christian enclave in the KRG, which the KRG could then control. These charges are being reproduced more broadly, including in an NPR broadcast and Washington Times op-ed. Some in UNAMI seem inclined to believe that so many allegations against the Kurds must have merit. (Comment: We believe that the charge of KRG involvement is politically motivated, but allegations of KRG responsibility have been repeated so widely they are gaining currency merely on the basis of repetition. End Comment.) During our October 15-16 interviews with displaced families, PRT heard more compelling testimony that the attacks were carried out by AQI or sympathetic terrorist or criminal enterprises. The Ambassador told four Christian leaders during a November 5 meeting that AQI, taking advantage of a complicated political landscape in the north, bore responsibility.

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